



Aurora Avenue North

N 110th Street to N 145th Street



April 2006

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) FOR AURORA BUSINESSES AND NEIGHBORS

The purpose of this FAQ is to address many of the questions that we have heard over the past year from you - business and property owners, their patrons, community groups, and neighbors. As the project develops, we will periodically revise this flyer and incorporate additional questions.

General project information

Tell me about this project.

The Aurora Ave North Transit, Pedestrian, and Safety Improvement Project from N 110th Street to N145th Street builds upon the SR 99 Corridor Study completed in 2003 by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and King County Metro Transit (Metro). The study included a series of recommended improvements along Aurora Avenue from the north end of the Battery Street Tunnel to N 145th Street in Shoreline.

The ultimate goal for the project is to **improve driver and pedestrian safety** along Aurora. Additional goals include:

- Minimizing right-of-way needs and impacts to property owners and businesses
- Finding workable parking solutions for businesses with limited lot space
- Improving transit operations
- Improving traffic flow
- Improving the aesthetics along the corridor

Keeping the Aurora business district thriving and vibrant

SDOT is now the lead agency charged with implementing the recommended improvements in the corridor study area between N 110th Street to N 145th Street. These improvements include:

- Widening existing lanes
- Adding a 24-hour southbound business access and transit (BAT) lane. BAT lanes are designated lanes for transit and right-turning vehicles only
- Adding a median with clearly defined left-turn and u-turn locations
- Constructing continuous sidewalks and landscaping on both sides of Aurora
- Improving pedestrian crossings at intersections

What is the schedule for the project?

The preliminary engineering and draft environmental documentation is scheduled to be complete summer 2006. The detailed design of a portion of this 35-block corridor will begin in fall 2006 and continue for about two years.

Construction will be scheduled separately in phases over the next 8-10 years. The phasing will be largely determined by available funding though consideration is also given to minimizing construction impacts and costs. Construction could begin as early as 2008. SDOT is also considering the timing of utility modifications and improvements. Seattle Public Utilities might complete some of these utility upgrades prior to or during the major widening construction. To that end, some modifications of the utilities (such as the drainage system) or the intersections could begin as early as 2007.

What's being done to minimize construction disruptions along Aurora?

SDOT knows that construction causes frustrating disruptions to businesses, commuters and residents, and will do what it can to minimize disruptions. Whether construction along the corridor is phased or not, disruptions associated with construction can happen in either scenario. One advantage to phasing construction is that disruptions are more localized than if the corridor was entirely widened at one time. Funding is another important benefit. At this time, SDOT will phase this project to take advantage of existing funding for construction from N 137th Street to N 145th Street. Part of that funding comes from federal and state grants that essentially require us to "use it or lose it."

How can I get involved? Who can I contact with questions?

SDOT has been involved in an intensive outreach process for the past year which has included meetings with the community, business associations, and property owners. You are encouraged to attend public meetings and informational briefings, respond to our project newsletters and mailings, and visit our project website at www.seattle.gov/transportation/aurora110.htm for updated information and to sign-up the listserv.

For general questions about the project, please contact SDOT Communications Specialist Peg Nielsen. For more specific questions pertaining to the design or property issues, contact SDOT project manager Diana Holloway with any questions or to schedule a meeting (contact information on last page).

Sidewalk improvements and landscaping***How wide will the sidewalk area be once construction is complete?***

WSDOT's Corridor Study recommended a *minimum* width of 10.5 ft for the sidewalk zone on both sides of Aurora. This would accommodate space for curbs, sidewalks, street trees, plantings, and utilities such as street lighting. To provide the most benefit for pedestrians, SDOT hopes to construct a 12 ft sidewalk zone along the corridor where possible. In some areas, the width might be less due to roadway or building constraints. The minimum sidewalk width per City Standard is 5.0 ft, which does not include space for curbs and landscaping.

Does this project include plans to complete sidewalk improvements on the streets that cross Aurora?

SDOT will construct new sidewalks along both sides of Aurora, but other sidewalk improvements will occur only at locations where existing sidewalk pavement on cross-streets needs to be transitioned to the new sidewalk pavement on Aurora Avenue.

Who do I contact about getting sidewalks or wheel chair curb ramps constructed in my neighborhood?

Sidewalk requests should go to SDOT's Pedestrian Program. Please visit <http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/transportation/pedestrian.htm> or call (206) 684-7583.

Are the planting areas needed since they may increase the project's right-of-way needs?

The landscaping will create a more welcoming and attractive atmosphere for pedestrians, motorists, and abutting businesses, while also providing a physical buffer between vehicle traffic and pedestrians. The width of the planting areas will vary throughout the corridor depending on the location of street trees and planting strips.

Where there will be a need to purchase private property, SDOT may agree to a reduced sidewalk area width, but as properties change ownership and are redeveloped over time, landscaping may be added back to achieve a 12 ft sidewalk zone. This kind of change will be made on a case-by-case basis.

What accommodations are being made for bicycles on Aurora?

Aurora is a heavily used vehicle highway with fast moving traffic and many driveways. These conditions make bicycling on Aurora a challenge. The proposed improvements will improve east/west crossings so bicyclists can connect to adjacent neighborhoods and parallel routes.

What accommodations are being made for people with special needs?

SDOT will construct sidewalks on both sides of the roadway as well as wheel chair curb ramps with yellow detectable warning surfaces at all street crossings. The sidewalks will accommodate a standard wheelchair.

What plans do you have for the pedestrian bridge at N 130th Street? Would there be enough ROW to keep it?

This project will not affect the structure itself, but will affect the sidewalks around it. The result will be improved access to the bridge and new wheel chair curb ramps will go in (street level) at the intersection.

Impacts on traffic flow

Can SDOT install a new signal at N 143rd Street in order to provide access to businesses and relieve some of the congestion at N 145th Street?

Traffic at the N 145th Street signal currently backs-up past N 143rd Street. SDOT has looked at putting a new signal at N 143rd Street but its proximity to N 145th Street means there is a strong likelihood that a new signal would create more congestion and may also create new safety hazards. As a result, N 140th is the preferred candidate for a new traffic signal. Ultimately, WSDOT is the agency responsible for approving new traffic signals along State Highways like Aurora.

Will the medians result in traffic delays at the major intersections and push traffic into neighborhood side streets?

SDOT does not expect significant traffic delays at major intersections. SDOT's traffic analysis shows that the north-south through-lanes will actually open up as turning vehicles move into either left-turn pockets or the BAT lanes.

What improvements to N 135th Street are planned to handle traffic?

Though this intersection does require improvements to address current capacity issues, SDOT does not anticipate that this project will generate additional traffic on N 135th Street and there are no major improvements currently planned on this cross street as part of this project.

Transit improvements

Are both the northbound and southbound BAT lanes going to be in effect 24 hours a day?

Yes. Aurora is a major transit corridor for the region and is just one part of the region's transportation system that includes the Interstate 5 corridor and the Light Rail system currently under construction. As a part of this regional transportation system, it has been identified as a candidate for a future Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) investment. The BAT lanes will enable Metro to provide more reliable service all hours of the day. The BAT lanes will also enhance the capacity and safety of the remaining travel lanes by removing slower moving buses from the stream of general traffic and allowing space for cars turning right from or onto Aurora to slow down or speed up.

Could the BAT lanes be open to all traffic during non-peak traffic hours?

Not at this time. However, once the BAT lanes are constructed and in operation, SDOT will monitor traffic during non-peak hours to determine if opening them during non-peak hours is needed.

Will this project include additional bus stops along the corridor?

Metro will keep transit stops in their existing locations. If SDOT is able to put a new signal between N 135th and N 145th Streets, then Metro will likely install a new transit stop near the new intersection.

Could light rail along Aurora be included as a part of this project?

While this project includes a number of improvements to the corridor – all in the hopes of improving safety and decreasing congestion – light rail is not destined for Aurora at this time. However, the new southbound BAT lane will accommodate more buses and enable BRT to be implemented on Aurora. This will help Metro improve service for residents and commuters along one of the busiest transit corridors in the city.

Access to businesses and neighborhoods

Why do we need a median? Could we keep the center double-turn lane as-is?

SDOT's mandate is to make safety its top priority. Between January 2002 and December 2004, over 500 accidents occurred between N 110th and N 145th Street, with 177 accidents located in or associated with the center two way left turn lane (2WLTL).

There are two reasons for this:

- High number of driveways on Aurora - On Aurora between N 110th and N 145th Streets, there are an average of 60 driveways per mile. National research has shown that where there are more than 30 driveways per mile, a 2WLTL fails to provide safe access.
- High volume of traffic on Aurora –The volume of vehicles also affects the performance of a 2WLTL. The threshold for number of vehicles per day that would trigger the need for raised medians to replace a 2WLTL is 25,000. Aurora averages around 40,000 vehicles per day.

Moreover, Aurora is a state highway (SR-99) and part of the National Highway System (NHS), making it fall under the jurisdiction of WSDOT's design standards and Washington State Access Management law. Aurora Avenue North is a Class 4 facility according to the WSDOT Access control classification system and standards. Within this class, access management measures are identified such as the installation of medians to mitigate turning, weaving, and crossing conflicts that affect safe travel. WSDOT requires a raised median to be implemented on Class 4 facilities with more than 25,000 vehicles per day. In addition, WSDOT prohibits two-way left-turn lanes on roadways where there are more than two lanes in each direction.

A median is required for this project based on high volumes of vehicles, high accident rates, number of driveways, and the number of lanes. Implementing the raised median will reduce accidents and the severity of accidents on Aurora.

To provide mid-block access between signalized intersections, the City has planned a number of turning pockets along the corridor. See below for more information about these mid-block turning locations.

I'm worried that the medians will affect access to businesses or my neighborhood. Where are left turns and u-turns allowed?

Left turns and u-turns by passenger vehicles will be allowed at all seven existing signalized intersections between N 110th and N 145th Streets. In addition, SDOT is proposing to build a total of nine left-turn/U-turn passenger vehicle locations for both north and south bound traffic mid-block, between signalized intersections, and at unsignalized intersections:

- Between N 118th and N 125th Streets, one turn in each direction (2)
- At the N 127th Street and N 143rd Street unsignalized intersections, northbound turns will be provided (2)
- Between N 130th and N 135th Streets, one turn in each direction (2)
- At N 137th Street, one turn in each direction (2)
- At N 140th, southbound turn will be provided (1)

How is SDOT deciding where to place breaks in the median?

The final locations will be determined by several factors including distance between intersections, safe turning widths, and adequate space for turning motorists lining up at the intersection. SDOT is also seeking input from business owners as it refines the design.

How will large delivery trucks access businesses once the median is constructed?

For those businesses with special needs, such as car dealerships, SDOT will meet with the business owners to discuss ways of accommodating those deliveries. Possible options could include consolidation and/or widening of driveways to manage delivery activities.

Parking, signage and other right-of-way impacts

The preliminary plans show that some businesses will need to reconfigure parking stalls or relocate signage. How is SDOT going to address that?

The answer depends on whether the parking and/or signage is located on City right-of-way or private property. SDOT will compensate property owners for loss of code-compliant parking and signage on privately-owned property. SDOT will also oversee and pay for the construction of private property modifications required as a result of changed parking configurations allowed by code. It is important to note that the current plans are still very preliminary and SDOT will be scheduling meetings with business and property owners to answer questions and gather feedback before finalizing the plans.

What if my parking or signage is on City right-of-way?

City-owned right-of-way is intended for the use and benefit of the general traveling public. Private use may be allowed (usually by street use permit) if there is not a current, general public need. Private use of public right-of-way is not a privilege and not a property owner right. Because no private property rights are involved, the City does not compensate property or business owners for loss of parking or signage that is located on City-owned right-of-way.

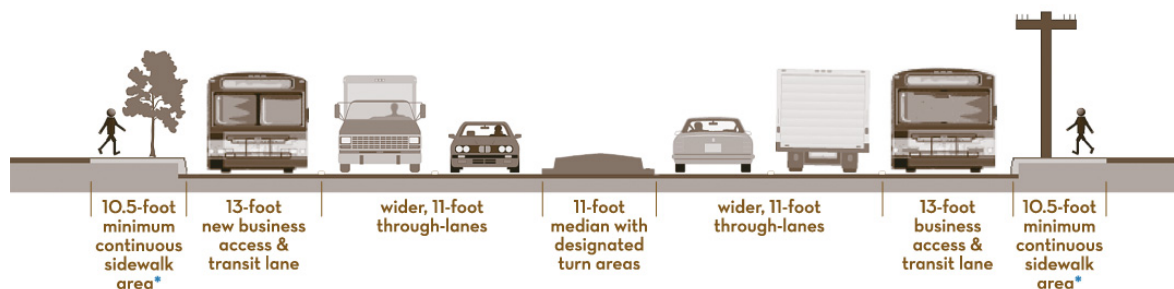
How do I determine if my parking or signage is on private property?

SDOT created aerial photos with the preliminary alignment that provide a good representation of property lines, though at this time they are not entirely accurate. These photos were presented at recent public meetings and with business and community groups. As SDOT continues the design process, we will obtain a detailed survey of the street right-of-way. The survey will extend approximately to the area that will be impacted by the project, but because SDOT will not survey the entire adjacent properties, property owners can hire a surveyor if this survey information is wanted prior to the City doing it.

The preliminary plans show impacts to some buildings. If a portion of a building is eliminated, how is SDOT going to handle that?

SDOT will compensate property owners for loss or damage to private property including the costs to modify buildings as a result of this project. However, the plans are still preliminary and one of SDOT's goals is to reduce physical impacts to buildings. During the design phase, SDOT will be meeting with property owners to determine ways to reduce such impacts.

Can SDOT narrow the median or build a simple barrier (like a curb) to reduce the project's right-of-way needs?



*sidewalk area width may vary due to existing structures and right-of-way constraints and opportunities

SDOT is doing as much as possible to minimize right-of-way needs and impacts to private property owners. The proposed cross-section above is a result of the 2003 Corridor Study and is the standard to

which SDOT must build. Reducing the size of the median where there are no left turns would not reduce right-of-way needs significantly. The recommended lane widths shown above are already narrower than current design standards. Because changes to the cross-section could compromise safety, any changes require approval from the WSDOT.

Utilities and stormwater improvements

Does this project include plans to underground the utilities along Aurora as was done in Shoreline?

The existing overhead lines will most likely be relocated between the new curb and the property line. Currently, there is no funding for putting utilities underground. Seattle City Light does not expect that funding would become available by the time SDOT begins construction.

How is SDOT going to handle side sewer reconnections? Will out-of-code side sewers be brought up to code?

SDOT does not anticipate that existing side sewers will be impacted by the project. However, SDOT will reconstruct any side sewers if they conflict with project improvements or are damaged during construction.

Does this project include improvements for managing storm water?

Yes, SDOT will be constructing a new storm water collection system and storm water quality treatment facilities as required for the roadway to meet the City's stormwater code and construction standards.

Improving public safety on Aurora

What is SDOT doing to discourage illegal activity on Aurora Avenue?

SDOT is aware of the safety concerns of businesses and residents and has made every effort (and will continue to do so during the design phase) to create an attractive and safe streetscape. Design features that address these concerns include landscaping on the sidewalks and medians that will not provide shelter or cover for illegal activities and providing low-lying shrubs to ensure a high level of visibility for vehicles and pedestrians. SDOT also expects that the improved sidewalks and enhanced lighting will result in more people walking or cycling along Aurora which will serve as an additional deterrent to criminal activity.

Where can I find more information?

Visit the project website at www.seattle.gov/transportation/aurora110.htm for regularly updated information.

You can also contact:

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or

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